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BROADCAST CAMPAIGN MESSAGES AND WOMEN'S VOTING DECISIONS DURING THE 2023 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined women's exposure to broadcast campaign messages, the frequency and patterns of that exposure, the messages' influence on voting decisions, and the relationship between exposure and voting decisions in the 2023 gubernatorial election in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study surveyed registered female voters (population = 1,133,543). Using the Taro Yamane formula, the study selected a sample of 400, accessed through multi-stage sampling across the three senatorial districts; 397 copies of the questionnaires (99.25%) were usable. A four-point Likert questionnaire (test-retest reliability = 0.92) was analysed using frequencies, percentages, weighted means (criterion mean = 2.50) and Pearson's correlation at the 0.05 level. Results show that exposure was high (mean = 3.29); radio (3.34) slightly exceeded television (3.23). Drama and entertainment-based formats (3.39), jingles (3.25) and advertisements (3.18) were the most appealing, whereas debates (2.17) and interviews (2.37) were not. Influence on voting decisions was moderate (mean = 2.64), strongest for perceptions of candidates (2.85) and weakest for choice of candidate (2.45). Results show a statistically significant positive relationship between exposure and voting decisions, where exposure correlated positively and significantly with voting decisions ($r = 0.93$, $p < 0.05$). The findings suggest that broadcast messages provided electoral information but did not necessarily determine women's final candidate choices, thus indicating that broadcast campaign messages were pervasive and shaped women's perceptions of candidates, but they were a complementary rather than a dominant influence on vote choice. Campaigners and broadcasters should pair attractive formats with substantive issue content.

Keywords: Broadcast campaign messages; Women voters; Voting decisions; Media exposure; Political communication; Gubernatorial election; Akwa Ibom State; Nigeria

1 INTRODUCTION

Broadcast media are important channels through which political parties and candidates communicate with voters during election campaigns. Radio and television carry campaign advertisements, jingles, interviews, debates, spot announcements, phone-in programmes and other political content. These messages may inform audiences about candidates and parties, highlight election issues and shape the salience of political matters. Akashoro et al. [1] define broadcasting as the planned provision of information, education and entertainment to large and heterogeneous audiences through radio and television. Ifeduba et al. [2] observe that its reach and real-time character give political candidates a platform to address large audiences and thereby shape public opinion. Kur and Nyekwere [3] locate the broadcast media within the public sphere, as organs of political information and forums in which socio-political discussion takes place.

Political campaigns are the periods in which candidates seek to persuade voters and secure their support. Albert [4] characterises them as political advocacy and strategic communication aimed at influencing the decisions of as many people as possible, while Agbim [5] and Bassey et al. [6] describe them as the principal means by which candidates bridge the gap between themselves and the electorate. Broadcast media remain prominent in this effort, and television remains a significant medium for political news and advertising, retaining a large share of political advertising expenditure because of its reach and emotional visual messaging, while radio's public trust, low cost and simplicity are vital in political news and advertising Shearer et al. [7]; UNESCO [10] attributes public trust in radio to its low cost and simplicity

In Akwa Ibom State, political parties and gubernatorial candidates used radio and television during the 2023 campaign to communicate manifestos, policy priorities and electoral appeals through jingles, advertisements, interviews, debates, sponsored programmes and spot announcements. Women, who constitute a substantial proportion of the voting population, were an important target of these messages.

1.1 Problem statement

Parties and candidates invest heavily in broadcast campaigns on the expectation that messages will inform and persuade voters. Whether this expectation holds for women in a specific subnational election cannot be assumed, because women are not a homogeneous voting bloc and their decisions may be shaped by party loyalty, interpersonal and community influence, economic circumstances and personal assessment of candidates, as well as by media content. Empirical evidence on how broadcast campaign messages shaped women's voting decisions in the 2023 Akwa Ibom gubernatorial election is limited. This study addresses that gap. The problem addressed in this article is therefore the need to distinguish women's level of exposure to broadcast campaign messages from the perceived influence of those messages on voting decisions, and to examine whether exposure was statistically associated with voting decisions during the election.

1.2 Scope of the study

The study covers women aged 18 years and above, resident in Akwa Ibom State and registered to vote in the 18 March 2023 gubernatorial election. Exposure was assessed in relation to private radio stations (Planet FM, Comfort FM, Inspiration FM, Passion FM and Tang Sio FM) and national television news channels (Channels TV, Arise News, TVC and AIT). Other elections, offices and broadcast stations fall outside its scope.

1.3 Objectives

The study sought to:

- ascertain the level of exposure of women to broadcast campaign messages during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Akwa Ibom State;
- examine the frequency and patterns of women's exposure to broadcast campaign messages during the election;
- examine the influence of broadcast campaign messages on women's voting decisions in the election; and
- determine the relationship between women's exposure to broadcast campaign messages and their voting decisions.

1.4 Hypotheses

The following null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

- H0: There is no significant relationship between exposure to broadcast campaign messages and women's voting decisions during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Akwa Ibom State.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Broadcast campaign messages, exposure and political behaviour

Broadcast campaign messages are political messages transmitted through radio and television to provide information about candidates, parties, policy positions and election activities. A broadcast campaign message is the image, narrative or ideology that a campaign communicates on behalf of a candidate through radio or television. Cebulash [11] defines it as a thematic and often emotional portrayal of a candidate or party that seeks to establish a connection with voters. Sivaraj [12] describes it as the core set of ideas, narratives and values that candidates present, crafted to inform voters of their positions, create opportunities for interaction and mobilise support. Sivaraj [12] further argues that voters' decisions are often driven by emotional impressions rather than purely rational analysis, which gives the format and tone of a message particular importance.

Explanatory models of voting behaviour indicate that vote choice rarely has a single cause. Antunes [13] and M'Barek et al. [14] distinguish the sociological model, which emphasises demographic characteristics and social networks; the psycho-social model, which combines personality, attitudes and group influences; and the rational choice model, which assumes that voters weigh the costs and benefits of alternatives. On these accounts, media exposure is expected to operate alongside social identity, partisanship, interpersonal influence and personal evaluation rather than as a sole determinant of voting decisions. Exposure patterns may differ by medium and message format. Radio and television can provide repeated campaign contact, while jingles and spot announcements deliver short, repeatable messages. Drama and storytelling package political content in narrative form.

Adegbola and Gearhart [15] observe that much of what citizens know about political actors is mediated, and that media use predicts political engagement, although its effects differ across media and countries. Inobemhe et al. [16] argue that, through agenda-setting and framing, the broadcast media highlight particular issues and influence how audiences interpret political actors. Corrigan-Brown and Wilkes [17] add that media coverage can build trust in candidates among audiences with limited prior information. Despite this literature, the effects of broadcast campaign messages on women's voting decisions in a gubernatorial election at the subnational level remain under-examined.

2.2 Empirical studies

Nigerian studies generally report high exposure and positive effects on awareness, but more mixed effects on vote choice. Udo-Akagha [18] found that residents of Akwa Ibom State were highly exposed to politics-related programmes on private radio stations, which informed their political discussions and encouraged participation. Uwalaka and Nwala [19] reported that voters in the South-South region were highly exposed to political advertisements, which motivated them to vote. Among women, Cajethan and Orji [20] found that 69% of respondents in Imo State frequently listened to a radio programme on women and politics, and Mbaave [21] found high exposure to women-focused radio programmes in Benue State.

Evidence on vote choice is more cautious. Ayoola et al. [22] reported that radio political broadcasts educated and mobilised Ogun State electorates without influencing their voting decisions. Ojekwe [23] found that Lagos voters were minimally influenced by a gubernatorial candidate's advertisements, even though most remembered his theme songs. Edem et al. [24] found that 64% of respondents in Imo State considered radio and television campaigns appealing enough to influence voting decisions, yet only 28% were influenced to vote for the sponsoring candidates. Ukaegbu et al. [25] reported that motivation to vote among Port Harcourt voters was not necessarily linked to exposure to radio campaigns. Taken together, these studies suggest that exposure is widespread but that its translation into vote choice is uncertain.

2.3 Theoretical framework

This study was based on the agenda-setting theory and the Yale persuasion theory. The Agenda-setting theory proposes that the mass media influence the importance the public attaches to issues. Valenzuela and McCombs [27] describe agenda-setting as the process through which the news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to public issues. Littlejohn and Foss [28] stress that the media are not credited with determining what audiences think, but with influencing what they think about. Applied here, repeated broadcast campaign messages may raise the salience of particular candidates, issues and electoral activities, and shape the criteria women use to evaluate candidates. The Yale persuasion theory describes the Yale approach as treating persuasion as a staged process in which a message must achieve exposure, attention, comprehension, acceptance, retention and, finally, behaviour Linne et al. [29]; with the

source, message, medium and audience characteristics conditioning each stage, so exposure alone does not guarantee influence.

Together, the theories lead to two expectations. First, exposure should raise the salience of candidates and shape evaluations of them. Second, exposure should be positively related to voting decisions, although the strength of that relationship depends on message credibility, appeal and audience predispositions. These expectations underpin the hypothesis tested in this study.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to measure women's exposure to broadcast campaign messages and how they relate to voting decisions.

3.2 Population and sample size

The population comprised 1,133,543 female voters aged 18 years and above, resident in Akwa Ibom State and listed in the register of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The sample size was determined with the Taro Yamane formula, $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$, where N is the population and e is the tolerable error (0.05). This yielded $n = 399.8$, rounded to 400.

3.3 Sampling procedure

A multi-stage non-probability sampling procedure was used, following the distinction between sampling techniques drawn by Wimmer and Dominick [30]. In the first stage, the three senatorial districts (Akwa Ibom North-East, South and North-West) served as geographical clusters. Because INEC did not supply verified figures of eligible female voters by district, the sample was distributed approximately equally: 134 respondents in North-East (the additional respondent was allocated to Uyo Local Government Area) and 133 each in South and North-West, spread across the 31 Local Government Areas. In the second stage, purposive sampling was used to select women aged 18 years or above who were resident in the State and registered to vote in the 2023 gubernatorial election. In the third stage, convenience sampling was used to recruit eligible respondents who were available and willing to participate.

3.4 Instrument, validity and reliability

Data were collected with a structured 29-item questionnaire using a four-point Likert scale (strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1). Two items measured frequency of exposure (radio and television), seven measured the appeal of message formats, and four measured the influence of broadcast campaign messages on voting decisions. Face validity was established through scrutiny by communication experts for clarity, conciseness, completeness and relevance. Reliability was assessed by the test-retest method, yielding a coefficient of 0.92.

3.5 Data collection

Data collection lasted six weeks. The researcher and six research assistants administered the questionnaire in respondents' business places, homes, churches and women's gatherings, and explained items in the local language where necessary. Of 400 copies distributed, 397 were retrieved and usable, a response rate of 99.25%.

3.6 Data analysis

Responses were coded and summarised using frequencies, simple percentages and weighted means. Because the midpoint of the four-point scale is 2.50, a weighted mean of 2.50 or above was interpreted as agreement and a mean below 2.50 as disagreement. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson's product-moment correlation at the 0.05 level of significance. The calculated coefficient was compared with the tabulated critical value reported by Weathington et al. [31], and the null hypothesis was rejected where $p < 0.05$.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Participation was voluntary, and the purpose of the study was explained to respondents at the outset. The survey was anonymous, and respondents' identities were not disclosed. Published sources used in the study were obtained through legal means and duly acknowledged.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Frequency of exposure

Women were highly exposed to broadcast campaign messages, with an average weighted mean of 3.31 (Table 1). In all, 376 respondents (94.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that they frequently listened to campaign messages on the radio, and 365 (91.9%) that they frequently watched them on television.

Table 1: Frequency of exposure to broadcast campaign messages (N = 397)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Frequently listened to campaign messages on radio	166	210	12	9	3.34	Accepted
Frequently watched campaign messages on television	147	218	12	20	3.23	Accepted
Average weighted mean					3.31	Accepted

SA = strongly agree; A = agree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree. Decision rule: mean $\geq$ 2.50 = accepted.

4.2 Patterns of exposure by medium and format

Two patterns emerged. First, radio (mean = 3.34) was marginally ahead of television (3.23). Second, appeal varied markedly by format (Table 2). Drama, storytelling and entertainment-based messages were the most appealing (3.39; 90.9% agreement), followed by jingles (3.25; 84.6%), advertisements (3.18; 82.6%) and spot announcements (3.15; 84.9%). Phone-in programmes (2.47), interviews and discussions with candidates (2.37) and debates (2.17) fell below the criterion mean. The average weighted mean across formats was 2.85.

Table 2: Exposure to broadcast campaign messages by medium

Broadcast medium	Weighted mean	Interpretation
Radio	3.34	Frequent exposure
Television	3.23	Frequent exposure
Average	3.29	Frequent exposure

Table 3: Broadcast campaign message formats (N = 397)

Format	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Drama, storytelling or entertainment-based messages	217	144	13	23	3.39	Accepted
Campaign jingles	180	156	43	18	3.25	Accepted
Campaign advertisements	158	170	53	16	3.18	Accepted
Spot announcements	140	197	43	17	3.15	Accepted
Phone-in programmes	74	119	124	80	2.47	Rejected
Interviews and discussions with candidates	65	99	151	82	2.37	Rejected
Debates among candidates	42	77	185	93	2.17	Rejected
Average weighted mean					2.85	Accepted

High exposure coincided with limited gains in substantive knowledge. Respondents agreed that broadcast messages informed them about parties and their programmes (mean = 3.08) and about candidates' character and competence (3.02), but did not agree that the messages helped them understand candidates' manifestos (2.37) or the major issues facing the State (2.17).

4.3 Influence on voting decisions

The average weighted mean for influence on voting decisions was 2.64, indicating moderate influence (Table 3). Influence was strongest on perceptions of candidates (2.85; 70.0% agreement) and on evaluation of candidates' credibility (2.72; 65.0%). Respondents also agreed that broadcast information helped them decide which party to support (2.53; 54.9%). They did not, however, agree that the messages influenced the candidate for whom they voted (2.45; 50.1%). As a supplementary indicator, respondents agreed that the messages motivated them to go out and vote on election day (3.12).

Table 4: Influence of broadcast campaign messages on voting decisions (N = 397)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Messages influenced perception of candidates	99	179	80	39	2.85	Accepted
Messages helped in evaluating the credibility of candidates	87	171	80	59	2.72	Accepted
Messages influenced the decision on which party to support	71	147	100	79	2.53	Accepted
Messages influenced the candidate to vote for	60	139	119	79	2.45	Rejected
Average weighted mean					2.64	Accepted

4.4 Relationship between exposure and voting decisions

Pearson's product-moment correlation indicated a very strong positive relationship between exposure to broadcast campaign messages and voting decisions ($r = 0.93$). The calculated coefficient exceeded the critical value of 0.8783 at the 0.05 level of significance ($df = 3$); the null hypothesis was therefore rejected ($p < 0.05$). Greater exposure was accordingly associated with stronger agreement that broadcast messages informed women's voting decisions.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Level and frequency of exposure

The first objective concerned the level of exposure of women to broadcast campaign messages during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Akwa Ibom State; The average weighted mean of 3.29 indicates that respondents reported frequent exposure to campaign messages, with radio slightly exceeding television. This finding is consistent with the thesis's wider discussion of radio as a source of political information in Akwa Ibom State [2,3]. It supports the conclusion that broadcast media were part of women's electoral information environment during the 2023 campaign. Regarding the second objective, radio and television were both reported as sources of frequent exposure. In terms of message-format patterns, drama and storytelling received the highest appeal score, followed by jingles, advertisements and spot announcements. Nevertheless, format appeal is not proof of persuasive effectiveness, and the lower scores for debates or interviews do not establish that these formats lack informational value.

The study reveals a high level of exposure (mean = 3.29; 92–95% agreement), which is consistent with earlier findings by Bassey and Dokubo [32], which showed that more than 83% of respondents in Akwa Ibom State were frequently exposed to broadcast campaigns during the 2023 elections. This pattern is broadly consistent with studies by Udo-Akagha [18], which found a similarly high exposure to politics-related radio programmes in the State. Ezegwu et al. [33] reported exposure above 80% among Abuja residents, while Cajethan and Orji [20] and Mbaave [21] documented substantial exposure of women in Imo and Benue States to political radio programmes. Viewed through agenda-setting theory [26], such saturation would be expected to make the election, its candidates and its activities highly salient in women's thinking. The slight lead of radio over television is consistent with UNESCO's [10] account of radio's affordability and accessibility, although the difference between the two media (3.34 versus 3.23) is small.

Women responded most to short, emotive and repeatable formats (drama, jingles, advertisements and spot announcements) and least to deliberative formats (debates, interviews and phone-in programmes). Utami and Wahid [34] found that narrative and dramatised political content raises participation, Klinger et al. [35] reported that dramatisation and emotional appeals yield higher engagement, and Mbaave [21] found that drama-styled programmes were preferred by women in Benue State. This accords with Sivaraj's [12] argument that voters' decisions are often driven by emotional impressions. The pattern suggests that attention was captured more readily by presentation than by argument, a reading reinforced by respondents' disagreement that the messages clarified manifestos or State issues. In terms of the Yale sequence described by Linne et al. [29], many messages may have achieved exposure and attention without consistently securing the comprehension and acceptance on which durable attitude change depends. These

patterns should be read with caution, because exposure was measured by agreement items rather than by hours or frequency of listening and viewing.

The study reveals a moderate influence on voting decisions (mean = 2.64). This mirrors studies in which broadcast campaigns raised awareness and mobilised voters without strongly determining candidate choice. Ayoola et al. [22] found no influence of radio broadcasts on voting decisions in Ogun State; Ojekwe [23] reported minimal influence of campaign advertisements in Lagos State; Edem et al. [24] found that only 28% of respondents were influenced to vote for sponsoring candidates; and Ukaegbu et al. [25] found that motivation to vote was not necessarily linked to radio campaign exposure. The present profile is consistent with this literature: broadcast messages shaped how women perceived and judged candidates, an agenda-setting and attitudinal effect, but did not clearly decide whom they voted for. This is compatible with the models reviewed by Antunes [13] and M'Barek et al. [14], in which social identity, partisanship, interpersonal influence and personal evaluation also shape vote choice. In the Yale framework [29], source credibility, message appeal and audience predispositions condition persuasion, which may explain why messages that attracted attention did not uniformly change choices. Broadcast messages appear to have played a complementary role, informing and reinforcing predispositions rather than overriding them.

Relationship between exposure and voting decisions. The strong and significant correlation ($r = 0.93$) indicates that exposure and reported influence on voting decisions varied together. This is not inconsistent with the moderate mean for voting decisions: a correlation describes how closely two measures covary, not the absolute level of influence. Nor does it establish causation, since women with greater political interest may both seek out broadcast content and report more influence from it. The finding is consistent with the Yale premise that exposure is the precondition of persuasion [29] and with the agenda-setting expectation that salience shapes evaluation [26]. Taken together, the results indicate that women were frequently exposed to broadcast campaign messages, found some formats more appealing than others, and reported moderate influence on voting decisions. The findings are compatible with Agenda-Setting Theory in the limited sense that broadcast communication can make electoral issues and candidate attributes salient; they do not establish that the media determined women's final choices.

Implications. For broadcasters and campaign managers, the findings suggest pairing the formats that women find attractive with substantive content on manifestos and State issues, the areas in which respondents reported least learning. For electoral stakeholders, radio and entertainment-based formats offer a practical route for reaching women with civic and voter education.

6 CONCLUSION

Women in Akwa Ibom State were highly exposed to broadcast campaign messages during the 2023 gubernatorial election, with radio marginally ahead of television, and they were drawn mainly to drama, jingles, advertisements and spot announcements rather than to debates and interviews. The messages influenced voting decisions to a moderate extent, mainly by shaping how women perceived and evaluated candidates rather than by determining the candidate they chose. Exposure was positively and significantly related to voting decisions. Broadcast campaign messages therefore operated as a complementary influence within a wider set of determinants of women's votes. Campaigners and broadcasters should combine appealing formats with clear issue-based content, and electoral stakeholders can use radio and entertainment-driven formats to reach women with civic and voter education.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

Statement of ethical approval

Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and the purpose of the study was explained to participants before they completed the questionnaire.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants who participated in the survey.

Data availability

The datasets generated during the study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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